



Medical School Hotline

Interest in Alternative Medicine by First Year Medical Students at the John A. Burns School of Medicine

Leslie Q. Tam, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Medical Education
and Eugene M. Kawaguchi, M.D.
Emergency Medicine Physician

Alternative Medicine (AM) is being used increasingly to complement allopathic medicine in the United States. In 1993, Eisenberg reported that more visits were made to AM practitioners (425 million) than to generalist physicians (388 million).¹ Over \$13.7 billion were paid for services such as holistic healing, homeopathy, naturopathy, yoga, t'ai chi, acupuncture, as well as manipulative and touch therapy, vitamins, herbals and macrobiotics, among many other forms of AM.

Recently, an informal survey was conducted of first year medical students at the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM). Students were asked whether they knew of, have used, knew of use by friends or relatives, or

would enroll in an AM elective if any of the following eleven modalities were covered:

- 1) Acupuncture:² The stimulation of certain points in the body to balance the movement of energy within the body. A major part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) which includes acupuncture, moxibustion, herbalism, massage, diet and exercise such as t'ai chi.
- 2) Acupressure & Shiatsu: The application of "finger pressure" to points (tsubo) to stimulate "ki," the Japanese word for Chi or energy.
- 3) Ayurvedic Medicine: The system of healthcare practiced in India and Sri Lanka, including detoxification, diet, exercise, herbs and techniques to improve mental and emotional health.
- 4) Aromatherapy: The use of essential oils (about 150 have been extracted) in holistic treatments (inhalations, diffusers, massage, baths and compresses) to improve health and emotional well-being and restore balance to



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the body. 5) Chinese Herbalism: The use of herbs to treat and prevent mental, physical and emotional ill health. 6) Five Mountain Medical Community:³ The North Hawai'i Community Hospital (NHCH) in Waimea embodies the Hawaiian spirit of healing and integrates complementary and allopathic medicine. People who visit the hospital experience a family-friendly atmosphere, a full range of services and amenities, and a healing of body, mind, and spirit. 7) Macrobiotics: The balancing of Chinese Yin and Yang through diet, exercise (t'ai chi or yoga), rest, and mental outlook each day. 8) Native Hawaiian Healing:⁴ Practices used by Hawaiians to maintain harmony in nature, including man. Healing of mind and body includes use of prayer, herbs, and others to enhance health and wellness. 9) Naturopathy: The healthcare system that features only natural ingredients and disciplines (e.g. healthy diet, fasting, hydrotherapy exercise, and relaxation techniques) to help the body heal itself. 10) Nutritional Therapy: The use of the diet to treat and prevent illness and to restore the body to a natural, healthy equilibrium. 11) Spiritual and Therapeutic Touch Healing: The re-orientation of the body's own "healing energy" by touch, usually from an experienced practitioner.

The questionnaire was distributed during a student colloquium and 42 of 56 students or 75% returned the survey by the end of the working day. The numbers of students having used or are currently using each of the practices were:

Chinese herbalism (8)
Aromatherapy (7)
Acupressure & shiatsu (5)
Acupuncture (4)
Native Hawaiian Healing (4)
Naturopathy (4)
Nutritional Therapy (4)
Ayurvedic Medicine (2)
Macrobiotics (2)
Spiritual & Touch Healing (1)
Five Mountain Community (0)

The numbers of students knowing of friends, relatives or others using each of the practices were:

Chinese herbalism (28)
Acupuncture (26)
Acupressure & shiatsu (20)
Native Hawaiian healing (15)
Aromatherapy (13)
Nutritional therapy (12)
Naturopathy (11)
Spiritual & touch healing (11)
Macrobiotics (6)
Five Mountain Community (4)
Ayurvedic Medicine (2)

Thirty-four percent of students had interest in one or more of the eleven AM practices and indicated that they would enroll in an elective if the subject was included:

Acupressure & shiatsu (19)
Chinese herbalism (19)
Acupuncture (18)

Native Hawaiian Healing (18)
Nutritional Therapy (18)
Five Mountain Community (14)
Macrobiotics (15)
Naturopathy (14)
Spiritual & Touch Healing (14)
Ayurvedic Medicine (8)
Aromatherapy (8)

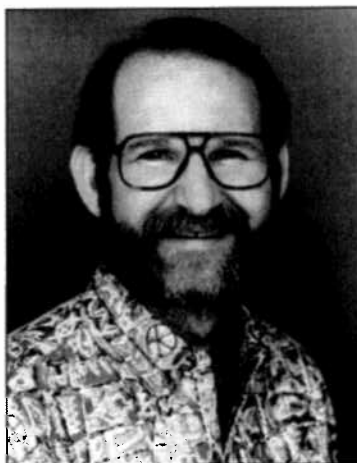
About half of the 125 medical schools in the United States offer some form of instruction in AM. At the JABSOM in February, 1997 two medical students organized a full-day, "Mind and Body Medicine Symposium." Invited speakers included faculty who delivered the key address "Alternative Medicine ... Out of the Closet" and others who spoke on "Integration of Alternative and Allopathic Medicine," "Bio-Magnetic Touch Healing," "Biofeedback," "Healing Touch," "Naturopathy," and "Acupuncture."

In response to the growing student and faculty interest, curriculum planners at the John A. Burns School of Medicine are searching for ways to introduce AM into the problem-based learning curriculum.

Students are encouraged to apply principles of evidence-based medicine, where possible, and to critically evaluate statements of global efficacy. Opportunities must be found for medical students to work in community settings in which alternative medicine is practiced, including dedicated sites such as the North Kohala Community Hospital. Research into the use of AM by Hawai'i's many cultural and ethnic groups must be encouraged. Currently, the use of AM is widespread and the expectations are that physicians of the future understand its benefits and adverse effects. However, the question of what educational experiences should be offered is unclear with curriculum planners who debate these issues as they prepare physicians of the future.

References

1. Eisenberg, D.M. et al. 1993. Unconventional medicine in the United States. Prevalence, cost and patterns of use. *N. Eng. J. Med.* 326:246-52.
2. Descriptions of AM therapies were from *Alternative Healthcare: A Comprehensive Guide To Therapies & Remedies*. N. Bradford (Ed.). Reed Internat. Books, Ltd. 1996. The therapies included in the questionnaire were randomly selected. Other well known AM therapies such as chiropractic, homeopathy and lesser known therapies such as autogenic training, cymatics, and the art therapies were not purposefully excluded.
3. website: <http://www.fivemtn.org>
4. Gutmanis, J. Kahuna La'au Lapa'au The Practice of Hawaiian Herbal Medicine. Island Heritage Publishing, 1997.



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